Each room contains, besides one of the tutors, a chalkboard, a wall border with a decorative frieze, game equipment, and a light switch. Either Jack or Bananas explains the game, displays the game pieces, and challenges the children to click on the appropriate answer. There's no fooling around in Banana's and Jack's classes. They put their students to work immediately, and each exercise is timed.

Within this framework, the program offers lavish rewards and encouragement. Each correct answer earns praise and a banana or jack-in-the-box from the classroom frieze. Incorrect or slow responses cause options to disappear, limiting potential mistakes. Jack and Bananas are as enthusiastic about the choice of the last remaining option as they are about the quickest picks. The only way to miss out on a reward is to refuse to answer at all. If that happens, the program moves to the next problem.

After each right answer, a cartoon figure trundles across the screen. Eight right answers, each accompanied by praise, popping Jacks, zipping bananas, and cartoon antics, earns a brass band fanfare, a fireworks display, and an invitation to play again. A click on the light switch sends kids back to the hallway to choose another game. They can exit by clicking on the stop sign.

One of the nicest things about this program is that kids keep most of their rewards. Once they've earned an icon from the frieze, it's theirs to play with at the click of a mouse. The animation rewards respond to the child as well, changing their shapes and antics at the child's whim.

This feature compensates for the program's single-minded focus and the absence of any free-form discovery options. Parents, particularly those whose children have a hearing deficiency, will want to keep the tempo slow to maximize the amount of time their children can spend questioning Bananas and Jack. It is, after all, the program's faultless realism in speech that sets *Ready, Set, Read* apart from other early reading programs.

*— Virginia Soper*

## Mayo Clinic's Family Health Book

The *Mayo Clinic Family Health Book* is a multimedia version of the health reference book of the same name. But this isn't merely a book copied to a CD-ROM disc. The creators spent quite a bit of time developing the interface, and bringing the pictures and sounds into a seamless reference package. Be prepared to devote quite a bit of time to exploring the nooks and crannies of this software behemoth.

As a comprehensive medical index for the general public, parents can use it for reference, or let their children use the fantastic anatomy section to learn about the human body. The program's anatomy section shows a diagram of a person. A "slider" bar allows the user to "peel away" layers — from the skin, to the muscles and organs, to the bones. At any time, point-and-click on a body part for a detailed description of the part, its function and its relationship to the body as a whole.

**The Mayo Clinic Family Health Book**

**Price:** $59.95

**In Brief:** A multimedia reference to health and body information, and to first aid tips.

**Requirements:** Macintosh with 4MB RAM; color display; CD-ROM drive; System 6.0.8 or higher; QuickTime extensions 1.5 or higher.

**Other Versions:** Windows CD-ROM ($59.95)

Interactive Ventures
1380 Corporate Center Curve #305
Eagan, MN 55121
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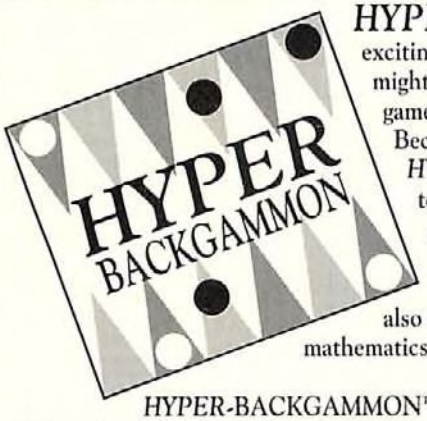
**Circle Inquiry #195**

Most items in the book feature a written entry, as well as some combination of photographs or drawings, QuickTime movies and audio. As a bonus for children, the computer narrator can read aloud just about any text, be it a chapter entry or a picture caption. The narration is rendered in an easy to understand computer voice. Audio levels do vary


# Not Just Another Roll Of The Dice




HYPER-BACKGAMMON™ is an exciting, new, fast-paced, CD-ROM game that just might be the antidote for all those "other" video games that are turning your kids' brains to mush. Because, unlike any other game on the market, HYPER-BACKGAMMON™ was programmed to calculate over 32 million different playing scenarios and is accurate to ±1%. Not only does this make your opponent a formidable three checker backgammon expert, it can also teach your kids a thing or two about about mathematics, probability theory, and risk management!

HYPER-BACKGAMMON™ uses only three playing pieces a side which makes the game faster, more exciting, and much more fun than original backgammon. It also makes it a lot easier for kids (and parents!) to understand the basic mathematics behind the game, like the probability that double sixes are going to save them from a crushing defeat, or the odds that doubling the computer will lead to an unexpected increase in your score. Who knows...this game could actually help improve your kids' interest in mathematics. Heck, they might even become a World Backgammon champion.

Available at CompUSA and your local software store, or call 1-310-659-6707.

ROMTIME

System Requirements: •PC or PS/2 compatible computer, •CD-ROM drive that supports the ISO-9660 standard, with interface card, cable, and software, •minimum 640K of RAM with 400K available, •DOS 3.1 or later, •VGA card and VGA color monitor.

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from segment to segment, which can be slightly irritating.

The program's Image Index features a glossary of medical terms, diseases and parts of the body. Click on a glossary item — *athlete's foot, heart pacemaker, vasectomy*, for example — and you'll clearly see (sometimes grotesque) pictures (or diagrams where appropriate.) The computer narrator explains what you're seeing.

The disc also contains a first aid reference; however, don't count on consulting it in a real emergency. By the time the program loads, the victim is likely to be long past the need for first aid.

Installing the Macintosh version, reviewed here, is fairly simple. For best results, copy the main program to your hard disk. The program requires the QuickTime extensions, but those utilities are not on the CD-ROM itself. Parents can get the extensions, free, from an on-line service or from an Apple dealer.

No medical reference is without omissions, including this one. For instance, although there is information about AIDS, there isn't an illustration of HIV, the AIDS virus. But even if the Image Index, which contains a wide variety of obscure and common ailments, is not complete, the program as a whole is genuinely useful for study and reference.

*— Kevin Savetz*

## The Deluxe American Heritage Dictionary, 3rd Edition

Students—and adults—think that using dictionaries is a pain. The *American Heritage dictionary* on disk relieves the agony of searching for that exact entry. The program is ideal for high school and college level work. It should be in anyone's computer who writes reports or has to use the English language intensively for work.

This electronic word database, which includes *Roget's II Thesaurus*, makes it easy to become an expert wordsmith. The combination is unbeatable. The program makes it quick and simple to look up multiple words, confirm alternate spellings, read multiple meanings and find synonyms for each alternative. It even provides a pronunciation key for each word.

One very useful feature is WordHunter. It's a reverse dictionary of sorts. Instead of typing in a word to see its meaning, type in a definition to find words. This is a great way to build an eager student's vocabulary. By typing in two related words with parameters like "and," "not" or "or," WordHunter will find other words that have that meaning. For example, entering *trip* OR *tour* will produce *junket*.

**The Deluxe American Heritage Dictionary, 3rd Edition**

**Price:** $129

**In Brief:** This on-line reference tool has more than 200,000 words and a peppy search engine for alternative spellings, synonyms and definitions.

**Requirements:** IBM or compatible with 4MB RAM; EGA or VGA display; 15MB hard disk space; Windows 3.1 or higher

**Other Versions:** A smaller Standard Edition requires 6MB of hard disk space. It sells for $59.95.

Star Press/WordStar International
201 Alameda del Prado
P.O. Box 6113
Novato, CA 94948
(800) 227-5609; (415) 382-8000
**Circle Inquiry #196**

Several other features give this program advantages over the print edition. One is abbreviations. Type in, for example, *CPU* to find its relationship to a computer. The biographical and geographical dictionaries are also fantastic sources. Students just type in a historical name or place to get an identification. Curious highschoolers can type in a college name to get its location. Wild card searches let students and parents use a question mark or asterisk for unknown letters — the program will compile a list of possible words.

Like the excellent print edition, the computer version includes details about a word's Indo-European roots. The Deluxe Edition also has information on word etymologies, usage notes, regional notes, world history and antonyms. The last word on this dictionary: an excellent resource for the entire family.

*— Jack Germain*